

A Flannel Shirt by Aceofstars16

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Summary:

Hopper gave El his flannel shirt after the bathtub scene, but that was hardly the end of it, in fact, it was the beginning. (Inspired a bit by the headcanon that El finds comfort in Hopper's flannel shirts, and me just wondering what happened inbetween scenes/seasons)

A Flannel Shirt

Author's Note:

[Tumblr post](#)

The darkness of the Inbetween still clung to El, even as arms held her, telling her she did a good job, reminding her that she wasn't alone. She could still see Barb, gone, long gone, and Will, so shaken and scared. That was enough to scare her, and the contact had drained her as well. It took her a while to gather up the strength to stand up and get out of the pool, and even then her arms shook as she pulled a towel around her shoulders.

El was dimly aware of voices, but they were hushed and quieted, maybe some were directed towards her, but she didn't know, her mind was still trying to calm itself from the mire.

"Here kid, take this."

Looking up, El saw the police chief looked at her, his expression unreadable as he handed her a shirt. Reaching out, she carefully took it, setting the damp towel down as she pulled it over her cold arms. There was a lingering warmth in the sleeves, and then it clicked into place. The chief had been wearing the same shirt, he had taken it off to give it to her.

El couldn't help but wonder why? Hopper – that was his name right? – didn't know her that well. He seemed...hesitant around her, though when she thought back on it, hadn't everyone been that way at first? She found herself glancing at the chief for a moment and caught him glancing in her direction for a second before quickly looking back at the rest of the group.

It had only been a few days since that night in the gym, but it felt much longer to El. She pulled the long sleeve tighter around her legs, trying to suppress a shiver as wind blew through the branches of the

bush she had managed to nestle behind.

Cold. That was all El had felt for, a week? Maybe it was longer than that, it was hard to keep track. All she knew was that she was tired of it. More than anything, she wanted to see Mike again. To feel safe and welcome. But she couldn't go back. The bad men were still out there. So the woods were her only option.

Day after day, El reminded herself of that. Even as cold white powder fell from the sky – beautiful at first only to turn dreadful as she realized it made everything colder. It drained her of hope, but she couldn't give up. Her friends might still need her, she knew she needed them. Every day, the thought of seeing them again kept her going. Because maybe, just maybe the bad men would leave, and then it would be safe.

Safe. That was what El wanted – a safe haven, somewhere she didn't have to kill for food or shiver as she slept. And then it came, in a way she hadn't expected.

The first time El had found one of the strange boxes, there was a dead rabbit in it. It was a terrible sight, but the growling in her stomach was relentless so she took it.

The next time she found one, it was empty. But she made a note of where it was, and slowly she found a few more. There weren't many, maybe five in all, but when she was too cold or tired to find some poor animal, they sometimes provided the food she needed.

Then one night she found something she wasn't expecting. Instead of some dead animal or slab of meat, there was a small container and... Eggos.

El had quickly looked up, trying to figure out where this had come from, but there was no sign of anyone. There were foot prints to and from the box, but that wasn't uncommon either. Still, this had to mean something, right?

So, El stayed by the box, keeping it in sight while keeping herself hidden. She didn't know how long she sat there, only that her stomach was twisting itself in knots again, urging her to get more food. But still she waited, she couldn't leave, not without knowing.

The sun had come and gone again and El's legs were freezing, despite her trying to move them back and forth. And then she heard it.

Footsteps.

Being careful not to make any noise, El stood up and poked her head out from behind the tree. She watched as a man bent down and opened the box, placing food in it again. But it wasn't just any man, it was the chief. Hopper.

El's mind tried to wrap around this. How did he know about her? Why would he bring her food? Then she glanced down at the long sleeve she was wearing under the coat she had taken. She didn't understand him, and she didn't know him very well, but she did know him. And maybe he could take her to Mike. If anything, he might be able to help her...wasn't that what he was doing with the food?

Taking a deep breath, El stepped out from her hiding spot, only to realize Hopper was already walking away. Panic seized her and she quickly followed his footprints, only slowing when she realized they were nearing the road – a place she had wanted to go but always stopped herself. But this time her feet kept moving. Now that she had made up her mind, she couldn't stop herself. The thought of not being alone any more, of seeing her friends again and of being safe again, it was too strong to resist.

Then Hopper stopped and El's feet stopped as well. Despite her hope, and the trust she had given him, there was still a fear that nagged at her. She needed an escape, in case he wasn't who she needed. But then he turned around, and all El saw was a quiet surprise in his eyes, tingled with emotions she couldn't quite name, but none of them bad. And so, she walked forward, carefully, quietly, hoping this was the right choice.

The first time Hopper hadn't signaled, fear gripped El. Her nerves were on edge and every sense was alert to the sounds of the cabin. As time ticked onward, it only grew worse to the point that it was unbearable. It was then that she had spotted Hopper's discarded plaid shirt. She wasn't sure what prompted her to pick it up, but as she held it, she could smell the lingering smoke on it, mixed with other scents she couldn't pick out. It wasn't the most pleasant smell, but something about it calmed her just a little. Pulling it on, she hugged herself, trying to let herself relax, if only a little.

From then on out, El found herself seeking comfort from Hopper's flannel shirts. When he didn't show up and didn't signal, she would pull on one of his shirts and hug it around her, not really sure why it was a comfort, but still grateful for it any way. Eggos also became a part of her calming routine. A reminder that she had food, and that she would see Mike again. When that was, she wasn't sure, but she would see him again.

If Hopper minded her confiscating his shirts, he never said anything, though he did seem to give her a few more shirts her size. But even when she officially had her own clothes, El found herself gravitating towards Hopper's shirts.

Even after she started going to school, El would nab one of Hopper's shirts after coming back to the cabin. Some might think she liked them because of the warmth that came from them being close or the softness of the fabric, but after time, El realized why she liked them. Yes, they were comfortable, but what really made them her favorites were because they reminded her of Hopper. Of how much he cared, even before he knew her. They reminded her that despite what happened at school or the lab or anywhere else, she had a family and a home.